

Atwood-Higgins House
Bound Brook Island Road
Wellfleet
Barnstable County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1087

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ATWOOD-HIGGINS HOUSE

HABS No. MA-1087

Location South Side of Bound Brook Island Road, Bound Brook Island,
Town of Wellfleet, Barnstable County, Massachusetts.

Present owner George K. Higgins, 30 Dean Road, Brookline, Mass.

Present occupant Mr. and Mrs. George K. Higgins.

Present use Summer residence.

Significance This is a fine specimen of a Cape Cod "double house", and Dr. Ernest Allen Connally, HABS Architect and historian, in his survey of Cape Cod houses in the summer of 1959, reported that this was locally considered to be the best example on Cape Cod. He found that the house has been carefully restored and preserved by the owner, who has been on this project, among other things, since 1919. The house is located within the area of the proposed Cape Cod National Sea Shore.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Original and subsequent owners In an interview with Mr. George Higgins in July and August, 1959, Dr. Connally traced the history of the house from Mr. Higgins' note book which lists all information on the transactions involving the title, plus the restoration that he has done. The earliest known transaction is a conveyance in 1805, and Mr. Higgins has the original deed in his safe. This deed was from Thomas Holbrook and Solomon Higgins, both yeomen, to Thomas Atwood, mariner, of Wellfleet, for \$396.96, as follows:

"... all the land that we now own in . . .
Wellfleet on Bound Brook Island with all the
wood on said land, and half the Dwellinghouse
now standing on said Island where said Higgins
now lives and dwells, and the Barn and Fences
now on said Land with the orchard and every
privilege of the Premises, including all the
pasture Meadow on said Island that said
Solomon has lately occupied and improved."

This deed was dated, signed, sealed on Feb. 20, 1805 and was recorded on March 26, 1805, in Deed Book 50, folio 100. This was burned (presumably in the court house fire of 1827 at Barnstable, Mass.) and the deed was re-recorded Jan. 5, 1829 in the 2nd Book of Records for the Town of Wellfleet, County of Barnstable, folio 289.

Dr. Connally reported further that Thomas Atwood (born 1762) who acquired the property in 1805 was the great, great, grandfather of the present owner, Mr. George K. Higgins. The house

passed to Thomas Atwood, Jr. (d. 1873), thence to his descendants, and to George K. Higgins in 1919.

Date of erection Apparently mid-18th century.

Architect Unknown.

Builder Unknown.

Original plans None known to exist.

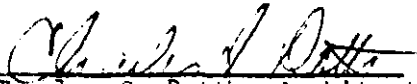
Alterations and additions This was originally a single house (or "half-house"), apparently mid-18th century, according to Dr. Connally, and it was doubled in the late 18th or early 19th century to make a "double house". It has been carefully restored and preserved by the present owner, who has a record of the changes made by him.

Historical events connected with the structure None of importance have been uncovered. The Higgins and Atwood families however were prominent in the early development of this part of Cape Cod. Also, Mr. Higgins, besides restoring the house in an excellent manner, has reconstructed a Cape Cod barn (1925) and a country store (1949) with meticulous care, on the property. The entire complex has the character of a museum and Mr. Higgins is to be complimented for his plans to leave this to posterity.

Sources of information Mr. George K. Higgins, present owner; Connally, Ernest Allen, "The Cape Cod House: An Introductory Study", Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. XIX, No. 2, May, 1960, pp. 47-56.

Likely sources not yet investigated Further search could be made of the Wellfleet Town Records and the Barnstable County Records, although the court house fire of 1827 destroyed many of the early Register of Deeds books.

Prepared by


Charles S. Dotts, Architect
HABS Cape Cod Survey I
Summer 1960, July 19.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

GENERAL STATEMENT

Architectural interest and merit Originally a Cape Cod single or "half house", apparently mid-18th century, this house was doubled in the late 18th or early 19th century to make a "double house". It is a fine specimen and is locally considered to be the best example on Cape Cod. Located within area of proposed Cape Cod National Seashore.

Condition of fabric Excellent. The present owner has carefully preserved and restored the house to its original condition.

EXTERIOR

Overall dimensions The original single house was 21' wide, and 27' long. The width was increased to 35' when it was "doubled". An ell addition to the north west of the house is 8 x 14.

Foundations Wood sills on brick foundations.

Wall construction This is "plank" construction, consisting of vertical planks as sheathing attached to the wood sills and the top plate or girt. Heavy corner posts and heavy sills and girts make up the frame work of the house, with wood trusses supporting the roof. The corner posts and summer beams are exposed on the interior of the house. The interior walls of lath and plaster, and wood wainscoting are applied directly to the inside of the vertical planks, and the exterior clapboards on the south or front side, together with the shingles on the other sides are applied directly to the exterior of the vertical planks.

The roof construction is exposed on the second floor. Here can be seen unfinished 4 x 6 roof trusses located 4'-0" and 3'-0" on center. These are joined at the top without a ridge pole. The trusses rest on the top girt of the framing system. 2 x 6 collar beams connect the two sides of a truss. 2 x 4 purlins connect each truss and serve as a base for the roof sheathing boards which run parallel to the trusses, in early Cape Cod fashion. Also, on the second floor, the vertical plank sheathing boards can be seen in the west gabled end of the house.

mill

Porches, stoops No porches; stone step at exterior doors, not original.

Chimneys One central brick stack with four flues, located over center of the house.

Openings - doorways and doors 6 panel wood doors with 5 light transoms at the north and south entrances.

Windows and shutters 9/6 light double hung wood sash on first floor, 6/6 on second floor. The window frames on the first floor, east side of the house, are set directly under the plate, and in the newer portion (west half), the window frames are complete.

There are no exterior shutters, however there are sliding "Indian" type wood shutters on the interior of the windows in the west front room, first floor.

Roof - shape, covering Gabled, pitched roof, wood shingles. Wood gutters and downspouts.

cornice, eaves Wood box cornice, short eaves.

dormers None.

THE INTERIOR

Floor plans This house faces south in typical Cape Cod manner, with the main entrance in the center, flanked by a two-window east room and by a two-window west room. The entrance and east part of the house comprised the original part of the structure, with the west part added at an unknown, but early, date. The front door leads into an entry way with doors leading off of it to the east and west front rooms. The narrow wood stairs to the second floor run north off the rear of this entry way. Directly to the west, beside the stairs, is located a small closet with a removable rear wall for access to the center of the house between the huge chimney complex.

Directly in back of the entry and the east front room is the kitchen with a small bed room or "berning" room and the buttery to the east of the kitchen. Entrance to these two rooms can be had from the kitchen, and in the bed room, a door leads from the east room. Also, one can enter the kitchen from the north side of the house, the door being located at the east end of the kitchen, next to the buttery which is on the north side of the house.

When the house was doubled, the front west room and a rear kitchen were added, plus an ell to the west of the kitchen. The two kitchens are joined with a doorway. A small bed room and second buttery are located within the ell addition at the northwest corner of the house. A second stairway to the second

floor runs to the west between this buttery and small bed room.

Fireplaces are located on the west wall of the east front room, the east wall of the west front room, the south wall of the east kitchen, and in the south west corner at an angle, in the west kitchen. Kitchen fireplaces have domed bake ovens.

On the second floor, the main stairway from the entry way enters directly in front of the massive chimney complex. Except for a partitioned east bed room, the second floor is an unfinished "open chamber", a Cape Cod name for the unpartitioned area of the second floor. Between the north and south partitions of the east bed room and the roof are located storage garrets with access from the open chamber.

Stairways Main stairs to second floor are of wood, 2'-5" wide with 9 risers. The stairs leading off of the west kitchen are 2'-0" wide.

Cellar An 8'-9" circular brick cellar lies under the small ell addition at the north west corner of the house. Entry is by exterior steps covered by a wooden "dog house" shelter on the south side of this ell.

Flooring Random width, 9 1/2" to 19" planks, which appear to be pine.

Wall and ceiling finish Plastered walls with wood wainscoting to the window stool height in the two front rooms. Vertical plank partitions of 9" to 18" boards between the east kitchen and the buttery and small east bed room. A wood wainscot is placed on the north wall of the east kitchen. Ceilings are plastered.

Doorways and doors 4 and 6 panel doors with glass in the 2 top panels of some of the 6 panel doors.

Trim East front room has molded square headed trim at windows, molded mitered trim at doors. This room has an excellent pine panel wall over the west wall fire place with a 12 light china cupboard and 3 panel storage door to the left of the fireplace. This room has an exposed summer beam. The west front room also has partly mitered and partly square trim, with paneling on the fireplace east wall.

Hardware For the most part, the hardware is early type, probably original. Included are HL hinges, old lift latches, and in the closet at the entry are curved head hinge straps.

Lighting Electric.

Heating Four fireplaces located in the east room, west room, west kitchen and east kitchen. No central heating.

SITE

Orientation and setting This house faces south in typical Cape Cod manner, in the lee of a hill, on a 200 acre tract. This area is well landscaped, consists of lawn, driveways, woods, and is an excellent setting.

Enclosures Typical Cape Cod post and rail fence.

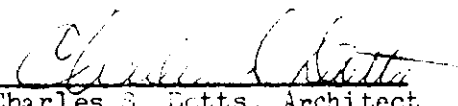
Outbuildings To the north east of the house is a small guest house that is new, although it was built of old materials under the close supervision of Mr. Higgins, the owner, who has made a study of the early Cape Cod house. A restored country store, with supplies collected from the New England states by the owner, and with attached office for the owner, is located about 50 yards northwest of the house. This was built in 1949.

About 50 yards north of the house is a Cape Cod barn, built in 1925. This barn is also furnished with early tools, a cutter, and an old sled. There is also a garage west of the house and a wood shelter north of a laundry house. Two outside privies are located on the grounds, one northwest of the guest house and one just west of the house.

Walks, driveways A drive runs from the road to the property with parking space at the northeast of the property, and with access to the garage on the west side of the property.

Landscaping Abundant, well trimmed lawn, shrubbery and trees, all planted informally.

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NOTE: A 140-page HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT dated September 1980 is contained in Field Record Notebook 2.